

9-30-1962

Notes: Seminary Address: A Relevant Theology (John 8:31-32), 1962

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Withering

I

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THEME A Relevant Theology

John 8, 31-32: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

1. No graduates of Concordia Seminary can stand in this place and on this occasion without giving way - at least for a moment - to the flood of memories breaking through the dam of time - here many of us caught the first, faint, far glimpse of the theology of the Cross - here we learned a little of the critical movement which was one of the great marks of the new ~~theology~~ ~~movement~~ is immortalized today by our new library - and in the intervening years we have seen the essential ~~essence~~ of Concordia Seminary increasingly reflected in its physical facilities - and, implicitly more important, those quiet paths and quadrangles moving to the agonies of modern man - ~~and so it was~~ ~~for a moment~~ to the legitimate pride and joy of an alumnus.

2. Surely I do not need to undermean the fact that the world - ~~and~~ the theological world - to which our Seminary must speak is far different from the world which we saw from the old buildings on South Jefferson forty years ago - true, there were shadows on the horizon and sons of the men had come to the Seminary from the last war for which St. Augustine was still relevant - but nothing like the world of the afternoon in the year of our lord 1962.

Begin with

3. As you know - the two most popular adjectives

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Christians

applies to this world of 1962 on "post-Christian"
and "post-modern" - both of them reflect the mood
of a day that is done - telling us that we are
really children of the afterglow - the principles of
historic exhortation has come true again - the present
choice are choosing ones men - the post-Christian
man is the man for whom God is absent &
silent & dead - the "post-modern man" is the
emerging successor of the modern man ^{what you} about eyes
of life was from the Renaissance to Karl Marx -
they really merge ~~into~~ one - the man of whom
Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote: "Man has never
been the same since God died" etc. "

u.

4. What has all this to do with the dedication of
a theological library? Answer clear; Out of these
living men come the knowledge & the wisdom & the
understanding which will enrich thousands of students
 of the Church to spread in this world of darkness
 this kind of word with reference direct and with power -
 out of our hands radiating of these words there will come
 a great shedding to the World & both within and
in creation and that for generations to come there
 will be men here who will contain in that Word -
that is it and love it & so that by that life and
by that love they will come, by the miracles &
mercy of God, to show the truth, to show them
embassadors of the truth & holders of the light & signs
of the longer which also put Christ in and put
modern man into his way, before the
eternity - and with all of that light and power to conquer
strang and unconquered - ye shall have the truth
simply strikingly relevant for our world -

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and the truth shall make you free - have you ever noted the astonishing, stunning quality of that last word? Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you - now what word might we expect. the truth shall make you ^{good} good, faithful, obedient, even holy! No, free is the word. and you can almost feel and see the startling and heavenly clarity with which our Lord looked forward through the years also to our post-media world - our prison house of fearfully wrong ideas - our chains of materialism - the whole sad and lonely captivity of man without God - his sense of darkness, of the slavery to things, his concentration camps of pleasure - all these he saw - and of all these my truth, my Father's truth, will make you free. free to live with the liberty of the sons of God, the forgiving freedom of the Cross, free to live with the stone rolled away.

5. And now we can begin to see the essence of a relevant ^{faithful} theology for our day - see it with his eyes - the eternal eyes for which there is nothing past. Christian since then can be ~~nothing~~ post-Christ. He calls man ^{man} forward & forward not to the freedom he has won but to the freedom he has lost - the freedom from the guilt and burden of sin - the freedom to do what God wants him to do. the freedom which came here to man on that afternoon when He, the truth, was on a Cross. when there was this brilliant lighting of the grey landscape of history - this final, revealing, ^{of} almost

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tangible grace - I love you - I have loved you
with an everlasting love. I have redeemed you - you
are mine

out standing must always be considered

6. And so - while this library contains today and
always will contain some scattered ^{actual} echoes of
the hopes from ^{from all the wisdom} Hithers, from Sinai, ^{ago} and from
Rome, its ^{ago} final relevance for all the ages to
come, lies in its reflection of Calvary, a ^{so it} [theology]
always & forever relevant because it has been
made and molded by the sacred hands of J.C. -
this and this alone is the way of man to the
truth - to ^{set upon} (follow) all the strange lights that the hopes
has shone throughout history and across the face of
the heavens and the earth, until they all - all of them -
fuse in the ^{eternity} distance that is the light of the Cross.

7. If a relevant theology is ^{faith} true with the obedience
of the Cross, it must by that very obedience,
maintain a continuing empathy with the agonies
of post-modern man. ^{the} theologians have been
accustomed to say that man is always essentially the
sinner without God he is always a ^{sinner} sinner - always
in need of grace - always running from God. This
is true - but it is also true that the world in
which he ^{sins} lives changes from age to age. That his
problems are different - and that in certain ages
such as ours - ^{so full} so full of shattering doubt -
man ^{sins} sins more loudly and more pitifully
for the ^{healing} healing of heaven - he is still the same
man but he is in a different place and a
deeper pain than ever before - grieve for a
moment - look back to 1900 - say what happened
well, a typical post-modern man, the late French

think

Norm out

N.B.

healing

our

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writer. Camus sums it up - life is a circumscribed garden - entirely surrounded by death; and beyond death, nothing; and all the time death rears its cushion into the garden in all the forms that human death in our time has taken - war, the cruelty of concentration camps, innocents abused, betrayed, honor lost, failure, defeat, disease - that is the vision of life of the post-modern, godless man.

8. The result? A new type of godless man - not merely the intellectualist, philosophical atheist or agnostic whom we have known these many centuries - but a man who is actively God-opposed - the German theologian says "gottwidrig" - a word that best captures the practical, active character of the post-modern, godless man. he is not only willing to have God dead, he wants to have a part in killing Him. he knows well that the living God is the death of his kind of man - represented especially by atheistic Marxism he has never succeeded to the silly slogan that religion is a ^{success} private affair. he knows very well that God or no, God touches every ^{one} problem of life, every problem of history, every segment of society. ^{now} he knows that the ^{old} ~~old~~ ^{new} gods are down. That we have come to a time of ^{new} after-or

9. And this is why it is so necessary for a relevant theology to hear again the ^{new} ~~old~~ ^{new} words - "if ye continue in my word" - then it may be a desperate and final quest, about it which will probably be clearer to our children than it is to us. ^{to} they ^{end} and we must now face the fact that there will be an ever rising dramatic crescendo of man's man, explicit and ultimates conflict between faith and unfaith, light and darkness, whatever corruption

the new
have never will
be any problem
of faith - a word

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which our time most necessary and our God most possible - "contrasts in my word - St. Augustine translates that into "adhuc Deo" to stick to God - that assent & consent - that seek and finding - that conversion and adhesion to God which also goes by the name of faith - to see our own great moment of visitation - to say to this world under judgment: "Jesus, who was with us, is the Lord and He is our Lord and He is with us, here, in this moment and always - the great affirmation, in our time and in our condition, of the divine presence, the divine mystery, and the divine action -"

10. One more word - it follows, that a relevant theology, as seldom before, must be a conversion theology - the freedom of continuing in this work leaves no room and no time for compromise or cowardice or dark visions of defeat - a modern writer has said that we must move deeper - in faith and in hope - upon the blessed incomprehensibility of God - the that reigns Israel - and we shall neither slumber nor sleep - "this evening time of the world" etc

11. Then - and then alone can we overcome the scandal and the mystery of a visible Church entirely involved in the uncertainty of its historic existence - its humanness - its long forgetfulness of the living power of the living God - and go on from viator to victor - in the great & glad company of the earthbound saints who have gone before us - who have continued in His word and have come at last to the problem of heaven - Adam no - this alone makes us relevant - St. Thomas was

when to pray with what gratitude - who was - we are getting but in the end one seldom makes a mistake - he is wrong - he is not happy when he can move this indifferent into these from the side & move himself

again + over with scandal

quite relevant - St. Thomas was

1. Opprobrium: we always live at the edge of mystery-

2. Michael Faraday "The reputation of the mind" - so must we work - humility

3. Keep mind open and deep - ^{frontiers}

4. A college should live on the edge of explosiveness - Andy Scholze ^{Brother} _{you know}

5. Meaning of words - sentences - regarded from all sides - context -

✓ discipline of the intellect - we can know proportion but can never reach it.